

# Dek Unu Magazine

Solo Exhibitions of Fine  
Photoart Portfolios

May, 2018

Featured Artist

**Soumyendra Saha**

"Shot Stories"

Cover Image: © Soumyendra Saha





# Artist Interview - Soumyendra Saha

**Welcome to Dek Unu, Soumyendra! You came to photography via a roundabout route.**

Yes, I am 45 years old and I was a software engineer and developer who decided to quit his cubicle job. Like any number of people, I had a DSLR and I had time on my hands, so I decided to shoot the streets one day... and that was it - I was hooked.

Photography, more so, street photography, is akin to a sort of Zen meditation, where I go into a zone, a higher level of consciousness and focus, where I begin to see many things which I would otherwise miss. A moment may be a simple arrangement of people and things and a particular quality of light, but the end result that it evokes, whether it is a thought or feeling, is much much greater than the sum of parts. Therein lies the sense of success, the thrill of street photography, and the source my of never-ending passion.

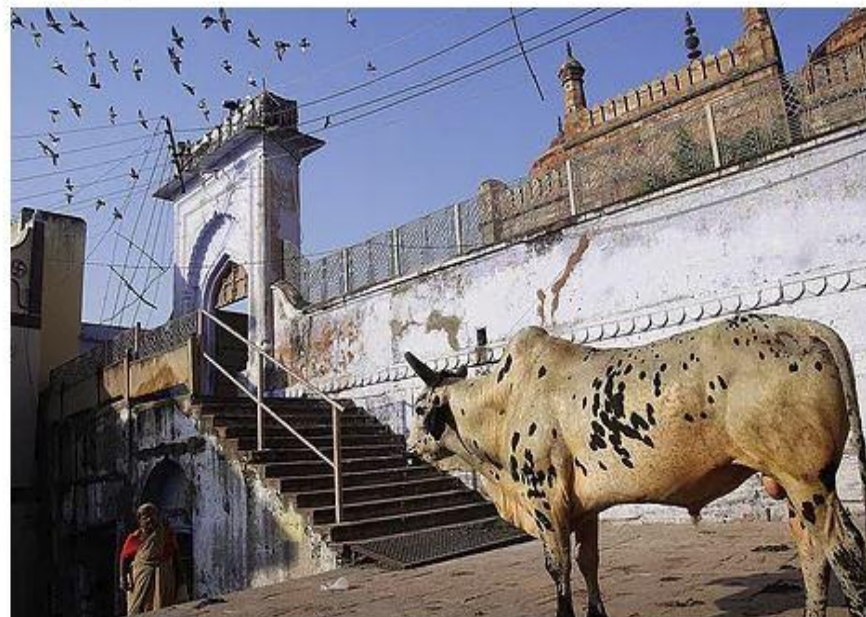
**After your university training in data systems, your training in photography is quite non-traditional.**

I prowled photography sites online, bought many photobooks of the masters, listened to a lot of Hindustani classical music, and watched movies at the local cine club. Visually hungry, I bought books instead of gear. Then, I went looking in the streets of Kolkata, my newly-adopted city, for unposed moments of surprise and emotion like those found in Cartier-Bresson, Diane Arbus, Richard Kalvar, Josef Koudelka's "Exiles," and Raghubir Singh's "India," I went looking for cinematic drama... only more real and on the streets.

In Kolkata, liberal arts is a way of life for a big percentage of people. Being a river city, the moist, fertile plains of Bengal provide a cocoon for the artistic - be it in painting, poetry, movies, literature. I moved to Kolkata three years ago and it fills me with the desire to see more, shoot more.

**Street photography is not just pictures taken in the street. How do you define successful street photography?**

I think street photography is just candid photography. You take your camera and go out on the streets and photograph whatever you find interesting. You try to tell stories using different elements and people - a summing of the parts. Good street images have an element of magic, a wow-factor. They often lift the too-simple or mundane to extra-ordinary using thought and feeling. There are many different approaches one might take to make good street images like minimalism, noir, layering, proximity, geometry, humor, surprise, intrigue but eventually it is, like a painting, a form of self-expression. The photographer is always visible in the photograph.







No Business





Shadow Man



Pots





Soul



Forever Together





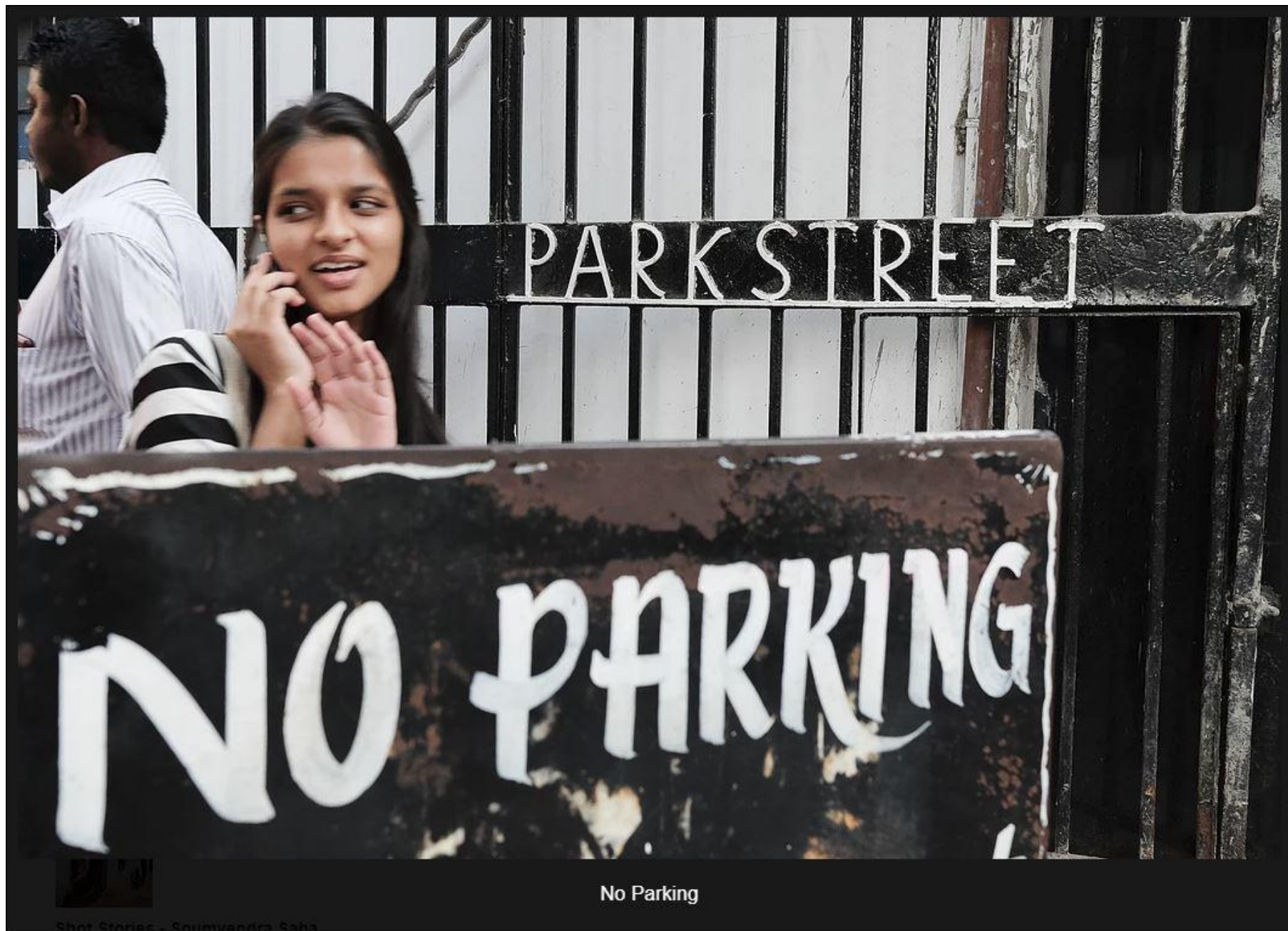
Multi-Tasking





Made In India





No Parking





Milky Way



After Life





Jump



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**There is an on-going discussion in the US and elsewhere about whether a photographer should ask permission to photograph people in the street.**

I think it is more of an issue in the West as the personal bubble is a bit larger there. In India, most people don't mind being photographed. If you respect your subjects, they will know. If you are noticed, just a smile after you take the photo usually works. Some people might ask, just to clarify the purpose of the photo. I briefly explain what I am doing and the "artist" keyword is often a trump-card. I never ask permission. I don't speak and I avoid eye-contact before the photograph. If people get suspicious afterwards, I approach them and explain a bit. I do not ask for model releases, I think that is taking things a bit too far. It kills the spirit of the art and genre. I mean, is it even practical to go around shooting with a bunch of forms in your hand? Mutual trust is a better option. You go out on the street to gently lift frozen pieces of everyday life to enjoy later. What is the harm there? If there is an objection, you gently explain and if someone is not happy with that, you offer to delete the photo.

**What about your method? Do you make a lot of exposures and select a winner at home? Or do you know immediately that you have caught a good one?**

I would say I have moved from making more exposures to fewer as I have developed as a photographer. Nowadays, I notice that I wait to take my camera out. I walk, sometimes many miles a day, and take a photo only when something really interests me. I do not go firing 20 or 30 shots at once. I will shoot 3 or 4 to refine or re-compose to make things perfect if I have the time and the subject is static. I can tell from the moment the viewfinder blinks for the shutter that I have nailed it.

Whenever I go out to shoot I keep two things in mind. One is to keep a cultural context, which will remind me of the time and place the shot was taken. A lingering smell of the place and the smile of the people. The other thing I try to keep a constant focus on is geometry. For me geometry is the source of a lot of reality, the



reality that we see day-in and day-out consists of a lot of geometrical structures and the underlying mathematics plays a role in our subconscious to shape the reality that we construct.

**Your most complex scenes are still carefully composed.**

When I started going out on the streets, I noticed that when I looked at thumbnails from a day's shoot of 200 images on Windows Explorer, those that caught my eye all that had strong lines and



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curves and were minimally composed. Those were the clean simple images. So I got into the habit of shooting frames that were like those and also I began automatically to frame an interesting subject with those ideas in mind. But I still shoot junky photos where the content sways me to such an extent that I forget the composition and mess it all up!

**Talk about your "kit." Are you exclusively a digital photographer? What camera, lenses, gizmos, etc.? What computer, software, filters and fun things?**

I shoot digital exclusively. I have used an entry-level Canon DSLR and a standard zoom lens for a long time. Lightweight was one of the deciding factors as to which camera I chose to use originally. But now, even though I have a lighter mirror-less camera, a Fujifilm XT\_10, I don't quite like the EVF. It is too contrasty and laggy for me. Natural light hitting the eye is best. No filters except the UV or lens protector ones and no flashes. Though I have a 23mm f/2 lens for the Fuji, I might soon fall back on a DSLR yet again.

I recently got a used old point-and-shoot, a Sony DSC-W100 which I keep in my pocket always to grab that sudden image, mostly for B/W and fun.

That is about it as far as camera gear goes. I have a locally-assembled desktop at home and the standard Lightroom and Photoshop. I use a Benq Eye-Care monitor which is very good for reducing eye-strain from long hours of editing.

**What's in the future? Plans for a project? Exhibition? Trip? Book?**

I am working on an ongoing cancer project at a nearby hospital. It is a paid project and my first foray into documentary photography. Underway now, it will end soon.

Later on, I plan to do more documentary work, but no concrete plans for now as to what. Transgenders and dhakis and the drum-beaters who migrate in hundreds to the city during festival season are two documentary ideas I have kept in the planning stage for quite some time.



For now, maybe, I'm too happy with street! I do wish to travel to some cities like Mumbai, Delhi and probably Paris, sometime, but those are like daydreams. I think about it and then realize there is so much more to cover back home in the lanes of Kolkata. I am never tired or bored on the streets of Kolkata.



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